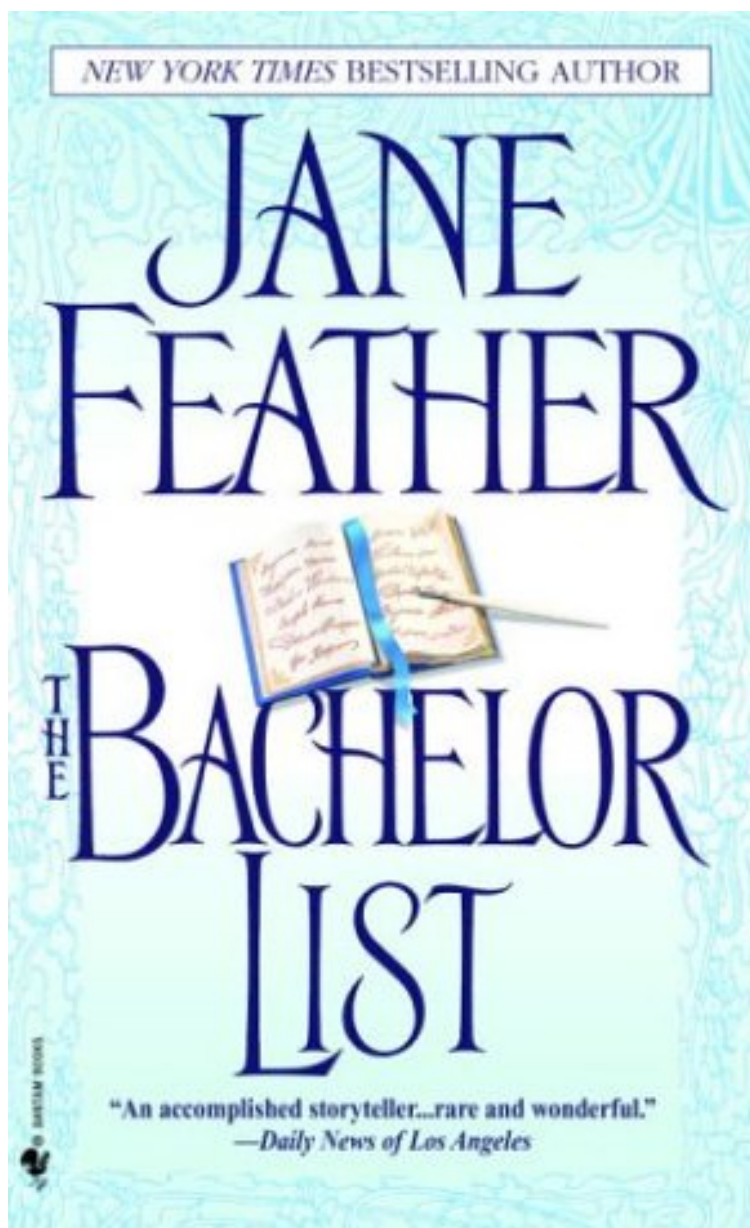


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# The Bachelor List



*Par Jane Feather*  
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**Par Jane Feather : The Bachelor List** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Bachelor List:

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## Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurIn this exhilarating new trilogy from New York Times bestselling author Jane Feather, a trio of spirited sisters secretly run a thriving matchmaking service. But these three good catches of impeccable pedigree have little interest in matrimony themselvesuntil, one by one, they meet their matches.Constance Duncan may be the eldest of three sisters, but she has more important things on her mind than finding a husbandfor herself, at any rate. Through the Personals services of her popular newspaper, The Mayfair Lady, Constance connects lonely hearts. But her own heart lies in her work, and nothing will

distract her from it until she finds herself irresistibly drawn to a man of disastrously different views. Max Ensor is a politician whose outmoded attitudes outrage here even as his powerful presence intrigues her. Clearly there is only one thing to do with such an exasperating man: convert him! Little does Constance know that Max has the same plan in mind for her.... What follows is a fiercely passionate duel in which two headstrong people discover that, differences or not, sometimes one gender cannot will not do without the other. From the Paperback edition. Extrait Chapter 1

Constance Duncan nodded at the doorman as he held open the glass doors to Fortnum and Mason. The buzz of voices greeted her from the wide marble expanse of the tearoom all but drowning the brave strains of the string quartet from the little dais at the rear of the polished dance floor. She stood for a moment at the threshold of the tearoom until she saw her two sisters sitting at a coveted table beside one of the long windows looking onto Piccadilly. The windows were streaked with rain, however, and offered little view of the street beyond or Burlington House opposite. Her sister Prudence saw her at the same moment. Constance raised a hand in acknowledgment and hurried between the tables toward them. "You look like a drowned rat," observed Chastity, the youngest of the three, when Constance reached them. "Thank you, sweetheart," Constance said, raising an ironic eyebrow. She shook rain off her umbrella and handed it to the morning-coated attendant who had appeared as if by magic. "It's raining cats and dogs." She unpinned her hat and examined it ruefully. "I think the ostrich feather is ruined. . . . At the very least it's going to drip all over everywhere." She handed the hat to the attendant. "You had better take this too. Perhaps it'll dry off in the cloakroom." "Certainly, Miss Duncan." The attendant received the dripping hat, bowed, and glided away. Constance pulled out a spindly gilt chair and sat down, spreading out the folds of her damp taffeta skirts. She drew off her kid gloves, smoothed them, and laid them on the table beside her. Her sisters waited patiently until she was comfortably settled. "Tea, Con?" Prudence lifted the silver teapot. "No, I think I'll have a shooting sherry," Constance said, turning to the waitress who now stood at the table. "I'm so cold and damp I might just as well be on a grouse moor, even though it is only July. Oh, and toasted tea cakes, please." The waitress bobbed a curtsy and hurried away. "Prue and I didn't get caught in the rain at all," Chastity said. "It started just as we arrived." She licked her finger and chased pastry crumbs around her plate. "Do you think we can afford it if I have another one of those delicious millefeuilles, Prue?" Prudence sighed. "I don't think we'll go bankrupt on your sweet tooth, Chas. It's the least of our worries." Constance regarded her sister sharply. "What now, Prue? Something new?" Prudence took off her spectacles and wiped the lenses on her napkin. She held them up to the light, peering shortsightedly. Deciding the smudge had gone she replaced them on the bridge of her long nose. "Jenkins came to me this morning looking even more mournful than usual. Apparently Father has instructed Harpers of Gracechurch Street to lay down a pipe of port for him and replenish his cellar with a dozen cases of a very special Margaux. Mr. Harper sent a very large and very overdue bill to Father with a polite request that it be settled before he filled the new order . . ." She broke off as the waitress appeared with a silver-lidded salver and a glass of rich dark sherry. The waitress placed them before Constance and lifted the lid on the salver to reveal a fragrantly steaming stack of toasted tea cakes, studded with plump raisins and oozing golden butter. "Those look delicious." Chastity stretched a hand and took one of the tea cakes. "You don't mind, Con?" "No, be my guest. But I thought you wanted another millefeuille." "No, I'll just share these, it'll be cheaper." Chastity took a buttery bite and wiped her mouth delicately with a fine linen napkin. "So how did Father react to Mr. Harper's bill, Prue?" "Guess . . . I'll have a slice of that decadent chocolate cake, please." Prudence leaned back in her chair and pointed to the confection on the cake trolley. "He started thundering around, threatening to take his business away from Harpers . . . This family's been customers of Harpers of Gracechurch Street for nearly a hundred years . . ." She took a forkful of cake and carried it to her lips. "The usual diatribe . . . oh, this is very good." "Perhaps I'll have a slice too." Chastity nodded to the waitress. "What about you, Con?" Constance shook her head and sipped sherry. "This is all the sweetness I need." "I don't know how you can resist all these luscious goodies," Chastity observed. "But I suppose that's how you stay so slim." She glanced down somewhat complacently at her rounded bosom contained beneath the bodice of a white lace blouse. "Of course, you're a lot taller than I am. That gives you an advantage." Constance laughed and shook her head. "To revert to the previous topic of money . . . I took some copies of *The Mayfair Lady* to a few newsagents this afternoon and asked if they would display them. Just one or two to start with to see if they would sell." "This edition?" Prudence reached beneath the table for her capacious handbag and drew out a broadsheet, which she laid on the table. "If that's the new one." Constance leaned forward to look. "Yes, that's the issue with the article about the new pub licensing laws." She smeared a piece of tea cake in a puddle of butter on her plate and ate it with relish. "I pointed it out to

the newsagents as something that their customers might find interesting. You know . . . how they can't drink themselves silly at any hour of the day or night anymore; whether it'll reduce drunkenness and increase productivity and stop men beating their wives. People must have some opinions on the subject, wouldn't you think? It's something that will affect your average Londoner." "Did you get any interest?" Prudence inquired, leafing through the three printed sheets. "Well, two of them agreed to carry it for a week and display it with the other magazines. We're only charging twopence, after all." "Twpence a copy won't tow us out of the River Tick," Chastity observed. "Well, that's just for the man on the street," Prudence pointed out. "We're charging sixpence a copy for Mayfair folk." She gestured eloquently to the elegant, chattering throng of tea drinkers and cake eaters around them. "I managed to persuade half a dozen hairdressers on Regent Street and in Piccadilly to display it on the counter by the till and Chastity laid siege to the modistes and milliners on Bond Street and Oxford Street." "With some success, I might add." Chastity sat back in her chair and regarded her empty plate somewhat regretfully. "I rather fancy myself as a saleswoman. I was very persuasive from beneath my veil." "Well, it's a start," Constance said. "But I think we need to offer more . . . more in the way of services . . . if we're going to charge for it." She leaned forward over the table, dropping her voice. "I have an idea that might turn out to be really lucrative." Her sisters leaned forward, elbows on the table, copper-colored heads close together. "You know those cards people put in shop windows," began Constance. "Well, I saw--" She broke off at a pointed cough just behind her. "Oh, Lord Lucan!" Prudence said, sitting up straight and smiling without too much warmth at the young man who had approached the table. "Good afternoon. We didn't hear you creep up on us." The visitor blushed crimson. "I . . . I . . . Forgive me. I didn't mean to creep up . . . or interrupt . . . I just wondered if Miss Chastity would give me this dance." He gestured rather weakly toward the dance floor, where couples were moving to the strains of a leisurely waltz. "I should be delighted, David." Chastity gave him a radiant smile. "How kind of you to ask me." She stood up as he drew back her chair, then she raised an eyebrow at her sisters. "I won't be long." She went off on Lord Lucan's arm, the emerald green wool of her skirt flowing gracefully with her step. "Chas is so patient with these poor young men," Prudence said. "They hover around her like wasps at the honey jar and she never shows the slightest irritation. It would drive me insane." "Our baby sister has a very sweet nature," Constance declared with a half smile. "Unlike us, Prue dear." "No," Prue agreed. "Positive ogresses, we are. We'd eat 'em alive given half a chance." "But remember how Mother always used to say that Chas, for all her seemingly amenable disposition, is no one's fool," Constance pointed out. Prudence made no immediate response and for a moment the two sat in silence, both occupied with their own memories of their mother, who had died three years earlier. "Do you think she'd turn in her grave at the idea of our making money off of The Mayfair Lady?" Constance asked after a while as the strains of the waltz came to an end. "No . . . she'd applaud it," Prudence said stoutly. "We have to do something to keep this family afloat, and Father's not going to help." After a little while, Chastity returned to the table on the arm of her partner, whom she dismissed with a sweet smile that was nevertheless firm. She took her chair again. "So, where were we?" "Moneymaking plans," Constance said. "I was asking Prue if she thought Mother would be horrified at the idea of selling The Mayfair Lady." "No, of course she wouldn't be. She'd have done it herself if there'd been any need." "Not that there would have been. If she was still alive Father wouldn't have thrown his money away on an impulsive gamble." Prudence shook her head in some disgust. "What could have possessed him to invest every sou in some chimerical venture? Who ever heard of a railway line across the Sahara?" "The Trans-Sahara Railway," said Constance with an involuntary chuckle. "If our situation wasn't so dire, it would be funny." Prudence was betrayed into a choke of laughter as reluctant as her elder sister's and Chastity tried not to smile but failed miserably. Their mother, Lady Duncan, had instilled in all three of her daughters with a frequently inconvenient and always irrepressible sense of humor. "Don't look now, but my ears are burning," Chastity said casually, picking a fat currant off the salver. "I'd lay any odds we're being earnestly if not salacioulsy discussed at this moment." "Who by?" Prudence leaned back in her chair and swept her myopic gaze around the salon. "Elizabeth Armitage has just sat down with a man I've never seen before." "Interesting," Constance said. "A stranger on this scene is certainly a rare sighting. Where are they?" "Behind you, but don't turn around, it'll be too obvious. I know she's talking about us, I can almost read her lips." "She's such a gossip," Prudence declared. "There's nothing wrong with gossip," Constance responded. "I write it all the time." She gestured to the broadsheet still lying on the table. "Look at the column I wrote on Page 2 about Patsy Maguire's wedding." "That's not real gossip," Chastity said. "That's just Society chitchat. Everyone loves that. It's not malicious." "I could imagine writing something malicious if I thought it would serve a useful purpose," Constance said thoughtfully. "Mother was all in favor of

exposing people's hypocrisy if she believed it would do some good." "Then it wouldn't be simply malicious gossip," Chastity stated. "But I wish I knew what Elizabeth is saying about us. I must say, that man is an attractive specimen. Far too attractive to be gossiping with Lady Armitage. Let me see if I can disconcert them." She propped her elbow on the table, rested her chin on her palm, and gazed steadily and serenely across the room at the table where an angular lady in her middle years was discoursing with a tall man whose hair waved luxuriantly across a broad forehead. "Chas, you're so bad," Prudence said even as she imitated her sister's elbow-propped pose and steady stare. Constance, whose back was to Lady Armitage and her companion, could only hide a grin and wait for a report. "Ah, that got to her. She's looking through her handbag," Chastity said with satisfaction. "And he's gazing around the room everywhere but here. He seems to be taking an inordinate interest in the dance floor. Perhaps he likes to tango." Constance could resist it no longer. She dropped her napkin to the floor, bent to pick it up, and as she did so, turned as casually as she could to look over her shoulder. "Oh, you're right. A very handsome specimen," she said. "Distinguished-looking, I would have said." "Bit arrogant, I would have said," added Prudence. "I suppose we should stop by the table on our way out?" Constance nodded solemnly. "It would only be polite. Elizabeth is a family friend, after all." She raised a hand towards the waitress and signaled for the bill. "But you haven't told us what your other idea is," Prudence reminded her. "Oh, I'll tell you while we dress for dinner." Constance picked up the copy of *The Mayfair Lady*, smoothing the sheets with her flat palm, while Prudence counted coins onto the table. The three women rose as one, gathering gloves, scarves, and handbags, then they strolled together through the tables, greeting occupants with a smile or a bow, pausing to exchange a word here and there. In this manner they arrived at the table occupied by Lady Elizabeth Armitage and her mysterious companion. "Elizabeth, how are you?" Constance bowed politely. "Terrible weather for the middle of summer, isn't it?" "Yes, indeed, terrible. How are you all, my dears? You look charming." Lady Armitage had recovered her poise and greeted the younger women with a dowager's smile. "You're out of half mourning now." "Lavender and dove gray grew a little boring," Constance said. "And Mother was never a stickler." "No, indeed. Poor woman." Lady Armitage allowed a small sympathetic sigh to escape her, then remembering her companion, turned in her chair. "My dears, allow me to introduce Max Ensor. He just won the by-election for Southwold and is newly arrived to take his seat in Parliament. His sister is a dear friend of mine. Lady Graham . . . so charming. I'm sure you're all acquainted with her. Mr. Ensor, may I present the Honorable Misses Duncan." She waved a hand between the gentleman, who had risen to his feet, and the ladies. He was taller than she had expected, Constance thought, and his rather powerful frame was set off to great advantage by the formality of his black frock coat, black waistcoat and gray striped trousers. She found the contrast between his silver-threaded black hair and his vivid blue eyes set beneath arched black eyebrows most striking. "Constance Duncan, Mr. Ensor," she said. "My sisters, Prudence and Chastity." She smiled. "We are certainly acquainted with Lady Graham. Do you stay with her at present?" Presentation de l'diteur In this exhilarating new trilogy from New York Times bestselling author Jane Feather, a trio of spirited sisters secretly run a thriving matchmaking service. But these three good catches of impeccable pedigree have little interest in matrimony themselves until, one by one, they meet their matches. Constance Duncan may be the eldest of three sisters, but she has more important things on her mind than finding a husband for herself, at any rate. Through the Personals services of her popular newspaper, *The Mayfair Lady*, Constance connects lonely hearts. But her own heart lies in her work, and nothing will distract her from it until she finds herself irresistibly drawn to a man of disastrously different views. Max Ensor is a politician whose outmoded attitudes outrage here even as his powerful presence intrigues her. Clearly there is only one thing to do with such an exasperating man: convert him! Little does Constance know that Max has the same plan in mind for her.... What follows is a fiercely passionate duel in which two headstrong people discover that, differences or not, sometimes one gender cannot will not do without the other. From the Paperback edition.